

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 123 (2014) 325 – 332

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

TTLC 2013

Students' dream of a “perfect” learning environment in private higher education in Malaysia: An exploratory study on “education in private university in Malaysia”

Christian Kahl*

Graduate School of Hospitality and Tourism Management Taylor's University, Lakeside Campus, No. 1 Jalan Taylor's 47500 Subang Jaya

Abstract

A university only exists because of its students. Semester – by - semester students are joining universities to become professional in their field. On the way to profession, students realize that their needs of a learning environment are different in the university system. But then how students can unify their needs of studying with the guidelines of the institution? This means that students' voice of how the university vision of teaching and learning development has to be established in the near future needs to be “up to date” has to be heard. This inquiry is one of the key points in today's Higher Education field.

Students' dream of a “perfect” learning environment in Higher Education will be the central point of this paper, in which it will show the detail of this vision, such as learning environment; learning support; learning/ teaching qualities - what a university needs to provide in order to guarantee the promise of a “perfect” learning environment.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of TTLC2013.

Keywords: Learning christian.kahl@taylors.edu.my environment; Teaching and learning development; Learning and teaching qualities

* Corresponding Author: Tel.: +60-3-5629-5436; fax: +60-3-5629-5522;
E-mail address: christian.kahl@taylors.edu.my

1. Introduction

The learning habits of students in Higher Education are changing frequently and universities/ colleges have to modify their learning environment to the needs of their students. Today's students are absolutely different to students at our time. Today's students are far more mobilized (Alexander, 2011). Today's students grew up with technology and they cannot live without it anymore (Bracy, Bevill, & Roach, 2010). This is what everybody thinks, how students are today and tomorrow. But is this the real pictures of higher education students (Hobart, 2008)?

Especially the Generation Y is forcing teaching and learning in Higher education in new directions. There understanding of learning is based on different learning techniques and needs to be recognized. E.g. the practice of interactive teaching and student centered teaching in classrooms, which is preferred by Generation Y students, needs to more intensive practice. These students are not willing to sit in a classroom for hours and listen to their lecturers. Learning needs to be more flexible and fun.

Technology in classrooms is another exemplar, which needs to be added to today's learning environment. Gaining knowledge is not only based on textbooks, it becomes more a practice to use technological devices to research on knowledge and discuss question via Internet or social media (Bracy et al., 2010).

Learning environments are changing and learning is not based on a classroom anymore. Learning is happening anywhere and today's students are learning in diverse environments. Every place can become a learning atmosphere where knowledge can discovered or reflect. The timeframe of learning has changed as well. Learning is happening all day long, which needs to be considered when learning spaces in universities are offered.

This paper is looking at this point of view, how students are identifying themselves and what they need to study successful in universities. The research was based on narrative interviews and open-ended questionnaires, in where students were asked how their dream university shall looks like. Through the interviews and questioning students it was implemented that the dream has to focus on the academic direction. In this way the dream was focused on learning styles, learning environment and learning qualities, as the results later will show. Students were asked to dream about their ideal university and what needs to change or updated to realize this dream.

1.1. Research objectives

- To identify student learning behavior.
- To identify students understanding of an optimal learning environment.
- To create a roadmap of a sustainable learning environment in Higher Education.

1.2. Research question:

How your dream university shall look like?

2. Background and Literature Review

As Mr. Friedman discussed in his book "The world is flat" today's life is not a life in a small closed society and it became an open internationalized platform where all people lives today (Friedman, 2007). This also includes today's students in Higher Education. Their study habits are not the same as the study generation five years ago. Students raise new needs and wishes in a daily rhythmus and universities have to start to listen to the suggestion of change to offer today's students a more society integrated learning environment (Bracy et al., 2010; Brock, 2013; Jung, Lin, & Kim, 2012; Koeller, 2012; McCrindle, 2006). Generation Y students have changed the learning and teaching methods (Alexander, 2011). Active learning (Gavatorta, 2012; Goldgehn, 2004) became the framework of learning. Students are not passively listening to lecturers and taking notes. Learning happens through conversations

and practical approaches (Hobart, 2008). Generation Y prefer to be involved in the learning process and drive their learning via their interests (Black, 2010). Interest (Koeller, 2012) of learning subject became the central point in today's teaching and learning. Lecturers became more of motivators and entertainers instead of teachers (Vargas, 2013). Providing knowledge became a secondary criterion to teach students after keeping students interested on the subject (McEwan, 2009). Especially with the short-term concentration span of Generation Y, teaching needs to be modified (Koeller, 2012). Lecturers have to switch regularly to different teaching and learning methods to keep students concentrated on the subject and the course (White & Kiegaldie, 2011). The best-proven way is through students' engagement in classes and in-deep discussions on the topic (Martin, 2008).

Technology is a non-missing part of our daily life in today's people life (Bracy et al., 2010). For example mobile phone is connected to all our daily life activities (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). The function of just using it for a call is not anymore the main function of a mobile phone. Today mobile phones are used for Internet surfing, communicating through messengers (Skype, MSN, and QQ) or blocking and facebooking (White & Kiegaldie, 2011). In addition, the example of Tokyo shows where technology is going in today's society. The entire city is wireless and everybody can log in the internet anywhere (Freemove, 2011). If this is a standard in the biggest city in the world, students on a university would like to take this service as granted and expecting that no matter where they are in the university they can go online. A good example is the University of Liverpool, which offers free wireless access at their campus. Students or staff can log in at the entire campus via computer or mobile (University of Liverpool, 2011). And Liverpool University is not the only example; Robinson (2006) showed that between 2005 and 2006 the wireless ability at universities increased by more than 10%. Students are expecting that they can go online and "googleing" for information (Schiefer, 1996). Today's students changed their learning habit. Their understanding is based on the available information provided by school, lecturer and the Internet (Reilly, 2012). Knowledge is not based anymore on why a person knows, instead on where information can be found (Reilly, 2012). Through this transformation of learning habits students are "googleing" information and as well sharing their knowledge with others via the Internet (Narasuman, Yunus, & Kamal, 2011).

Another phenomenon is the mobilization of today's generation. People are no longer fixed on one place for their entire life/ life period (Martin, 2008). This also can be transformed to today's students in Higher Education. Students are not fixed on their classroom and their seat in the library (McMillan, 2006). They make their own decision where they want to do their study or work (Murphy, 2007). So it might happen that a lecturer will meet his students at a coffee shop and doing their assignment beside a coffee. Another example it is that students are not using the library as an instrument of literature research. The Internet and its unlimited usages open new doors for literature research and as mentioned at the former examples students are browsing at any places where they are (United We Stand, 2007). The understanding of collecting knowledge is based on an understanding of sharing knowledge. Today's generation do not prefer to read long academic texts, instead they are looking for key points and discussing these points (Narasuman et al., 2011). All information needs to be short and fast. Information is for proceeding through an event, and not for reflecting on it.

These examples give a view of the changes of today's students learning habits and needs in today's study environment. Universities have to start to look at these changes and have to re-align their study environments to student's needs. Today's universities are starting to analyze their study culture and transform their campuses to the need of their students.

3. Methods

3.1. Interviews

In today's field of research interviews are instruments that are deeply implemented to measure thoughts of people and structures of systems and societies. Especially the thoughts of people can be more specific measured, if interviews are used. The benefit is that every single opinion of each interviewee can be recorded and later on

analyzed. Furthermore, with all single recorded information a more specific picture of the real world can be duplicated. However, to interview more than 9000 students in a university is a nearly impossible thing to do. For this, it was decided that a random interview session has to conduct. But why randomly and who will be part of the random selection? A random selection of interviewees is securing that diverse groups of individuals with different backgrounds will be asked. E.g. every university has students from different milieus, and every milieu presents its own specific behaviors and ideas. Therefore, it is logical to select people from different milieus to get a bright band of information in the culture of this specific university (Creswell, 2007; Mack, Woodsong, & MacQueen, 2005; Saldana, 2009).

For this research project the student council was chosen to be the focus group for the interview session. The advantage of the student council is that student delegation of all different schools and department are meeting each other and discussing the opportunities to implement a better ground for studying. For the project of the students' dream of a "perfect" university, this selected group is the ideal focus group. Because, these students already collected information of learning and teaching improvement through their own council assignment and have already a better overview of, what and who, students want to have changed for getting a "perfect" university. The student council itself has 25 members, who are presenting all students from all 12 schools at Taylor's University. The students themselves coming from different year and present the entire spectrum from the first year to the final year. Overall, the interview focus group represents all different schools, all different semester and all different milieus inside and outside of the university.

3.2. *Surveys*

Beside the focus group interview, the research also is based on a classical survey structure. To provide a better overall picture of what students dream, surveys were handled out to 95 students of all different school divisions and were collected back after filling them out. Since all schools at Taylor's University were involved in the survey research, only randomly selected students of each school has been asked to participate in the survey. The selection of students was done in two ways. At first, a course was selected and ten students in this course were asked to stay longer after their classes and filled out the surveys. However, at the time of the research, students from several schools already were in examination time or left the university for their holiday. For all courses who were in examination, surveys were handled to ten random chosen students after their examination. Again they were asked to stay longer after their examination to do the survey. One school was already in the study off period and students were asked to fill out the survey via E-mail. Randomly, ten students were chosen and asked to answer the survey.

3.3. *Student Satisfaction Survey*

Part of the daily work at student center is to stay in close contact with students and guide them through the time in university. This includes as well asking students' feedback about the university and the quality of the academic life. For this, students can log in the university platform and give their opinion every time and everywhere. The collected data will be analyzed regularly and suggestion will be forwarded to each involved department to design structures to support students better in the academic life. This data also includes student's voices of their dream how their university of the future should be designed.

All these information has been identified and added to the data of the survey, and the open interview to tri-angle the research outcome (Lindhof, 2002).

3.4. *Categorizing*

Since all data (survey, interview and student feedback form) is quality research data the categorizing of the data has been done in two steps (Richards, 2005).

To identify the main points of each person's comment and create categories to illustrating the entire picture.

Categories of all participants have been compared and same and similar categories combined. In this way categories could be standardized and objectivized (Saldana, 2009).

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Student Narrative Interview

The student narrative interview was held with students of all different schools at the university. Through the arrangement of the university, the students council, which has members from all schools, programs and academic years was willing to share their dream of a “perfect” university via narrative interview. There had been four different findings:

The first finding is about the future lecturer; lecturers have to be knowledgeable. Students are appreciating lecturers who coming from the industry and sharing their knowledge in the class. There is still a trend that students want to know everything what it needs to be a professional in their field. Beside the knowledge of the subject, lecturers also should be professional in classroom management. Students are looking for professional mentor who supporting them through their studies. Who gives them advises on what they have to learn and advises on how to learn. Since technology is a strong part of teaching today, students are also looking for learning experience with classroom technology, such as presentation tools or social media.

The second finding is about the learning experiences outside of the classroom. Students understand that classroom experiences are the most important part of their learning experiences. However, beside the classroom, students are looking for more field trips opportunities, to gain more detail knowledge from the practical side.

The third finding is the need of more resources. Students are looking forward to extend the learning resources at the university. One way is the extension of the library, where more resources can be added. Or online resources where e-books or lecturer notes can be provided to students.

The last finding is the technology. Particularly, students are looking forward to a WIFI campus, where they can study at any places anytime, which confirms the dream of virtual study, where students can study in their own pace and own study habits.

4.2. Student Open Survey

The students open survey was designed with two open questions about their current academic support system at the university and their dream of a “perfect” university, which should support them in all their needed learning outcomes. The survey is focusing on these two questions to get a more realistic picture of what students think about the learning environment and learning support from the university and what can be done to improve the academic support in and outside the classrooms. Overall five key dreams of students have been analyzed.

“Dream one” is based on the learning styles in the classrooms. 59% of the questioned students do not emphasis on frontal lecturing anymore. All learning techniques should be based on projects and problems. Especially the question of case studies had been asked regularly, where students implement that learning through cases is more needed in classes. As well as hands-on practice in classrooms is welcome by students. Students want not only learn by hearing, the trend is learning by doing. And doing can have several different directions. Such as students centered learning, where a lecturer involves students to discover a new topic and work with them through the entire subject, or through field trips, where students can experience the knowledge on real examples and can implement it later in classwork.

“Dream two” is based on the lecturers themselves. Overall the feedback about lecturers and their teaching style is positive. However, 35% of the questioned students are dreaming of more active and professional lecturers, who are starting to be more interactive in class and teaching in new ways. Especially the uses of technology in classrooms by lectures are more requested. Students are asking for more than just Power Point Presentations. The frequent updating of software will support for students learning progress. Both Soft Skill (Teaching Quality) and Use of Technology are getting central in today’s classroom management and students starting to requesting that their lecturer have this to skills and improving it through training often.

“Dream three” is based on technology itself. Technology is a key part of students’ life in today’s society and should be reachable in the entire campus. 24% of the questioned students would prefer if more computer and computer labs are available, so they can prepare for classes or do their assignment next to classroom or the library. Not surprisingly students prefer Mac Labs and wishing to see more in the future. Beside the hardware, software updates is a dream too. To study with the time flow, software should be updated and offered to all computers. Besides the fixed computers, students are changing their habit. More students bring their own laptops with them and wish that they are able to enter into the internet and doing their assignments anywhere. For this a WIFI system has to be in place to support studying everywhere in the university.

“Dream four” is greater library. The classical building where students gain knowledge is and will be the library. And students are still using it as one of the places to increase their knowledge for their subjects and for prepare for examination. However, a library is only as good as the knowledge inside. For this 29% of the questioned students suggestion of increase books in the library needs to be heard. Because knowledge in each course is not stopping on one point and needs the support from the library. The size of the library is another wish. Students are willing to spend a lot of time in the library; however they want to ensure that they have a space to stay in the library to study by themselves.

“Dream five” is the study areas outside the classrooms. In today’s student life, 19% of the questioned students are looking for self-study rooms and/or discussion rooms. Studying is not stopping when students exit the classrooms. Since all learning support is on-campus students prefer to do their study at the same place. Nevertheless, places where students can self-study are still rare and are wished to extend in the university. The opening hours should be extended. Students prefer to study in their own pace and feel difficult to find study rooms at certain times. The suggestion of the student body is, to transfer study room to a 24/7 module, so that every day and around the clock students are able to study.

4.3. Student Satisfaction Survey

The student satisfaction survey is an alternative way for students to give feedback about the university and about their studies. Especially the study feedback was significant for the question of the “Dream” University. And again three major “dreams” had been identified:

“Dream one” is that the continuous lecturers training. Students are asking for more knowledgeable lecturers on the field of expertise. For example, if a lecturer is teaching engineering then students prefer to have industrial experts in their classroom, who share their knowledge and expertise. However, with industrial experts in classrooms the need of professional teacher training will increase and students as well looking for more interactive and supportive lectures in the classrooms. Students are seeing themselves more as an active learner, who a visual/practical needs input through their learning and on the other side a strong supportive lecturer, who leads him through his learning process. The fun issue is also a central point; students are looking for certain exciting activities in class and prefer when higher education minimize teacher centered learning.

“Dream two” is the continues updating of IT equipment at the university. Especially the WIFI system is a “big dream” for students, because of their study habits. Only with a fast and stable WIFI system is guaranteed that students can log in the Internet with their laptops on campus and doing their assignments. On the other side students

still using the traditional way to log in the Internet and using one computer in one of the various computer labs. However, with increasing numbers of students and the fast updating of hard- and software the maintaining of the computer labs has to move in a more central position at the university, to offer all students the same chance to study without barriers.

“Dream three” is the continuously extension of the library. Students are looking for more resources at libraries. With the increasing number of books, more than 56000 published books in US in 2008 (Bowker, 2009), the need of resources for each school need to be guaranteed, so that students are able to use new knowledge in their study day by day. Besides the resources, space for studying is another important student “dream”, such as self-study rooms, 24/7 study rooms or discussion rooms, so that every student has the ability to study in his own pace.

5. Conclusion

Students Dream of a “perfect” university is a dream, which can be realized. Today’s students are dreaming of four major perfections.

Firstly, there is the dream of a digitized campus, where students can study at their pace and time. This includes a Wi-Fi system at the university, which supports students’ need of being online, such as Liverpool University where students do have the opportunity to being everywhere and every time online. In addition, enough and well equipped computer pools, where students can do their assignment. Students are technology mobilized (Bracy et al., 2010; Reilly, 2012; Schiefer, 1996; Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009) and they are requesting the same for their study environment. As discussed before technology is the new learning tool and students are seeking to use this tool constantly (Reilly, 2012).

Secondly, students are dreaming of a larger range of resources. The trend of university libraries is to expand their resources constantly and students are supporting this direction. However, students also started to look deeper in online resources. Students are interested in lecturer capture and online lecturer notes, which they can download and use for their assignments.

Thirdly, besides resources students are also dreaming about more possibilities to do their assignments in study rooms outside on campus. Students want to stay in the university doing their assignment to ensure that they have fast access to resources (library) or support (lecturer/ classmates). All the same, these study rooms should be opened in a 24/7 modes. As discussed earlier, students prefer to control their pace and time through their study (Alexander, 2011; Gavartorta, 2012; Goldgehn, 2004; Hobart, 2008) and dreaming of this 24/7 study rooms.

Fourthly, students are also dreaming of their “perfect” lecturer, who should be knowledgeable in their field. Knowledge means more than to know what is written in the textbook. Students are eagle to combine knowledge between classroom and industry (Schofield & Honoré, 2010). That means, lecturer also should know about practical use of knowledge in the industry. Since students’ deep interest in technology, they are looking forward to have technology part of their classroom experiences (Bracy et al., 2010; Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009).

Students are dreaming of a different university than today exists. They are dreaming of a learning environment where they can study anywhere and anytime. And this is possible, as private universities in Malaysia are already on the way to realize this dream and support students as much as possible in their study progress.

Further studies should be implemented on the deeper understanding of students understanding on “dream university” and the possibilities on how this understanding can be realized in Higher Education in Malaysia.

References

- Alexander, C. (2011). A STUDY OF THE COGNITIVE DETERMINANTS OF GENERATION Y’S ENTITLEMENT MENTALITY. *Academy of Educational Leadership*, 16(2), 63–69.

- Black, A. (2010). Gen Y: Who they are and how they learn. *Educational Horizons* (Vol. 88, pp. 92–101). Pi Lambda Theta, Inc. 4101 East Third Street, Bloomington.
- Blake, R., More Universities Going Wireless. Available at: <<http://www.crunchgear.com/2006/10/23/more-universities-going-wireless/>> [Accessed 5 July 2011].
- Bracy, C., Bevill, S., & Roach, T. D. (2010). THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING. *Proceedings of the Academy of Educational Leadership*, 15(2), 21–26.
- Bowker Reports U.S. Book Production. 2009 Available at: <<http://www.bowker.com/bookwire/IndustryStats2009.pdf>> [Accessed 5 July 2011].
- Brock, C. (2013). Comparative Education and the Geographical Factor. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 2(1), 9–17.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *QUALITATIVE INQUIRY & RESEARCH DESIGN Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Papua and New Guinea medical journal (Vol. 49, pp. 5–13). Thousand Oaks, London, New Dehli: SagePublications.
- Freespot, 2011. Available at: <<http://www.freespot.com/>> [Accessed 5 July 2011].
- Friedman, T. L., 2007. *The world is flat*. 2nd edition. Penguin. London.
- Gavatorta, S. (2012). It's a Millennial Thing.
- Goldgehn, L. a. (2004). Generation Who, What, Y? What You Need to Know About Generation Y. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 5(1), 24–34.
- Hobart, J. W. (2008). *Understanding Generation Y What You Need to Know About the Millennials*. Princeton One White Paper.
- Jung, J.-Y., Lin, W.-Y., & Kim, Y.-C. (2012). The dynamic relationship between East Asian adolescents' use of the internet and their use of other media. *New Media & Society*, 14(6), 969–986.
- Koeller, M. (2012). From Baby Boomers to Generation Y Millennials: Ideas on How Professors Might Structure Classes for this Media Conscious Generation. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 12(1), 77–83.
- Lindhof, T. R., Taylor, B. C., 2002. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Second Edition. SAGE Publication. Thousand Oaks. London. New Delhi.
- Liverpool University, 2011. Going Wireless. Available at: <<http://wireless.liv.ac.uk/misc/goingwireless.php>> [Accessed 5 July 2011].
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., & MacQueen, K. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collectors field guide*. Family Health, 120.
- Martin, C. A. (2008). *GETTING HIGH ON GEN Y: How to Engage the Entitlement Generation*. Career Planning and Adult Development Journal, 19–23.
- McCrindle, M. (2006). *Understanding Generation Y*. The Australian Leadership Foundation.
- McEwan, A. M. (2009). *Generation Y: Coming To A Workplace Near You*. The Smart Work Company, 1–5.
- Mcmillan, S. J. (2006). Coming of age with the internet: A qualitative exploration of how the internet has become an integral part of young people's lives. *New Media & Society*, 8(1), 73–95.
- Murphy, S. A. (2007). *Leading a Multigenerational Workforce Table of Contents*.
- Narasuman, S., Yunus, M. R. M., & Kamal, A. A. (2011). NET GENERATION STUDENT TEACHERS: HOW TECH-SAVVY ARE THEY? *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education*, 26(1), 71–89.
- Reilly, P. (2012). Understanding and Teaching Generation Y. In *English Teaching Forum* (Vol. 1, pp. 2–11).
- Richards, L., 2005. *Handling Qualitative Data, A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publication. Thousand Oaks. London. New Delhi.
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage Publications.
- Schiefer, D. (1996). G E N E R A T I O N Y I M A r b e i t s u m f e l d. *k/c/e Marketing*, 2, 1–11.
- Schofield, C. P., & Honoré, S. (2010). Generation Y and learning. *The Ashridge Journal*, 26–32.
- United we stand. 2007. Where college students like to do homework and what this reveals about their personalities. Available at: <<http://www.helium.com/items/317793-where-college-students-like-to-do-homework-and-what-this-reveals-about-their>> [Accessed 5 July 2011].
- Vargas, J. (2013). *Generation Y*.
- Wessels, P., & Steenkamp, L. (2009). Generation Y students: Appropriate learning styles and teaching approaches in the economic and management sciences faculty. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23(5), 1039–1058.
- White, G., & Kiegaldie, D. (2011). Gen Y learners: just how concerned should we be? *The clinical teacher*, 8(4), 263–6.